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# 'The Book Of Life' Review: Why Disney's Mistake Was Fox's Greatest Win

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By **Maria G. Valdez** Oct 16 2014, 03:57PM EDT



Starring Channing Tatum, Zoe Saldana and Diego Luna, "The Book of Life" will give you an overview of the colorful tradition of "Día de los Muertos." In theaters October 17. 20th Century Fox

Last year, I learned that Disney wanted to [trademark the Día de los Muertos](#), a very Mexican tradition that focuses on remembering the dead, celebrating their lives and gathering family and friends to do so in a lively manner, full of color and with specific rituals. They backed off after the article I wrote exposing it (although at the time I just thought of it as a cool way for kids all over the world to learn about this), mostly because it prompted a petition online that got thousands of signatures and a lot of angry Disney fans.

Of course, I later understood that you couldn't trademark a tradition like that. Commercializing on the folklore of a culture to benefit a major company and not precisely the country where that tradition hails from, just wasn't right. Disney pulled back altogether and decided not to touch the subject again.

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Although it was a victory for the Día de los Muertos advocates, it was a great loss for Disney. Not too long after the whole situation blew up, calmed down and eventually was forgotten, Fox announced that they're releasing an animated film based on the Día de los Muertos.

Silently, while Disney was in the spotlight, Fox explored the options and found a fantastic script from **Jorge R. Gutiérrez** that he had been working on for years. Originally titled "El Matador," it went on to become "Día de los Muertos" to finally end as "The Book of Life." The results are fantastic. Of course, it's not like Fox owns the whole "Día de los Muertos," as Disney intended to do, and the movie is a nice reminder of the tradition with great Latino actors as well as their fine American counterparts, crafted to appeal to both younger and older audiences.

Directed by Gutiérrez himself and produced by famed Mexican director **Guillermo del Toro**, *The Book of Life* focuses on the journey of **Manolo Sánchez (Diego Luna)**, a young man who is torn between fulfilling the expectations of his family and following his heart. In love with the beautiful **María (Zoe Saldana)**, yet having to battle with the affections of the charming **Joaquín (Channing Tatum)** to win her heart, the spirits **La Muerte (Kate del Castillo)** and **Xibalba (Ron Perlman)** bet on who will win María.



Kate del Castillo and Ron Perlman voice characters La Muerte and Xibalba 20th Century Fox

In his journey, Manolo battles between life and death for his love for María, and is forced to face his greatest fears in order to prove himself worthy. What I loved about the movie was that they began by explaining about what Día de los Muertos is about, and the film entered a magical world where the story took place. Although the concept of a "love story," which is the main storyline, might be overdone, this time around Gutiérrez gives it a different twist worth watching.

He mixes life, death, traditions and pop culture in a way that they all blend in perfection, and introduces the music of **Gustavo Santaolalla**, one of the most famous Latino musicians, composers and producers. The soundtrack also included more "Latinized" versions of Radiohead's "Creep," Mumford and Sons' "I Will Wait" and Biz Markie's "Just a Friend," along with music by Owl City and 30 Seconds to Mars. Something I loved was hearing a "Cielito Lindo" version by none other than **Plácido Domingo**, who voiced one of the characters, and songs by Latinos **Jessie & Joy**, **Café Tacvba**, **Kinky** and **La Santa Cecilia**. It was definitely a great mix of both the Hispanic and American market.

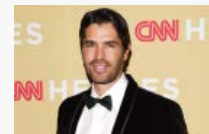
Another fantastic blend was the casting selection. You have famous Hollywood names such as **Channing Tatum**, **Ice Cube**, **Christina Applegate** and **Ron Perlman**, together with some of the most recognized Latinos in Hollywood like **Zoe Saldana**, **Diego Luna**, **Héctor Elizondo**, **Danny Trejo**, **Eugenio Derbez**, **Cheech Marin** and **Gabriel Iglesias**; but also Latino names that might not be as recognized in the American market but are staples in the Hispanic market: **Angélica María**, **Kate del Castillo**, **Ana de la Reguera** and **Sandra Echeverría**.

Latino, American, or any ethnicity, the movie will captivate you one way or another. Could be the love

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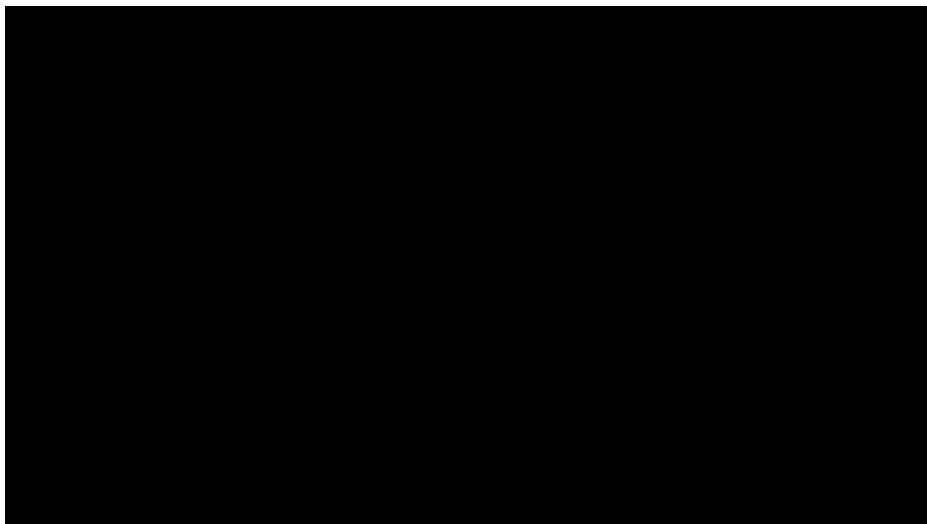


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story, the transitions between the world of the dead and the living, the songs, the colors, the traditions, Manolo's struggle with following his passion versus pleasing his family, or even the "friendly rivalry" between him and Joaquín. Truth is, The Book of Life is totally recommended. Great to go see with your whole family, friends, significant other or whoever's up for a great time, healthy fun and something that's going to make you feel good!

The Book of Life opens October 17.



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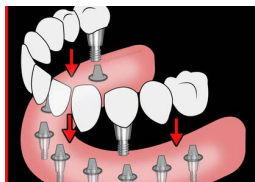
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**Maria G. Valdez**

Born and raised Dominican living in New York (do not confuse with Dominican-York), who claims to be



Sofia Vergara's long lost daughter and who has an unhealthy obsession with JLo. Associate Editor of Latin Times, overseeing the editorial operation and content strategy of the website. Trained journalist and musical theater performer with solid entertainment instincts. Experience covering human interest stories and social and large scale events with focus on Latino entertainment. Maria began her career in journalism in her native Dominican Republic where she worked for Ritmo Social, one of the country's most prestigious magazines, and as on-air co-host of a radio variety show.

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